

Risk Perception towards Emerging Food Safety Risks on Fresh Produce; the impact of governmental trust on evoked fear

Authors: Melanie De Vocht (1,2), Verolien Cauberghe (1), Mieke Uyttendaele (2), Benedikt Sas (2)

Presenter: Melanie De Vocht, PhD student in risk communication

Melanie.devocht@ugent.be

Oral format

Abstract

Introduction:

Fresh produce is an important part of a healthy diet. However, due to recent disease outbreaks and rapid alerts attributed to fresh produce and derived food products, concerns emerged with regard to food safety. The EU Veg-i-Trade project conducts research on emerging food safety risks related to fresh vegetables and fruit due to climate change and global sourcing. Some of these risks cannot be prevented by the consumers (e.g., pesticide residues, mycotoxins,...) which stresses the importance of governmental trust.

Purpose:

Risk communication is necessary to prevent people starting a scare when a food-borne outbreak might occur. The Extended Parallel Processing Model (EPPM) of Witte (1992) is the most appropriate threat/risk related model to explain consumers' reactions to health risk messages. Threat appeals trigger a process by which individuals appraise two perceptions: the perceived threat (susceptibility and severity) and the perceived (self- or response) efficacy of the hazard which may result in either message acceptance or avoidance.

Method:

In November 2010 a survey was conducted among 456 participants in Belgium. This survey measured general risk perception, problem awareness, evoked emotions, behavioral intentions and socio-demographics.

Results:

Beside descriptive results related to socio-demographic differences, a significant interaction effect between susceptibility and governmental trust on the evoked level of fear ($F(1, 452) = 3.854, p=0.05$) appeared. Only when the governmental trust is low, susceptibility increases the level of fear. When trust is high, there appeared no effect of susceptibility of the threat.

Significance:

This study stresses the importance of governmental trust. In addition, these results show that evoked fear has a significant positive effect on risk perception. This risk perception has subsequently an impact on the intention to rinse fresh produce better ($r = .388, p < .001$), but not on the intention to eat it less. Based on these findings further research and risk communication strategies are suggested.